

DECLARER PLAY - WEEK 6  
PLAYING SUIT CONTRACTS - PART 2  
(Ruffing Losers)

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The basic strategy that should be followed to make your trump suit contract is:

1. Listen to opponents' bids.
2. Observe the opening lead.
3. Plan your offense:
  - a. Consider the number of tricks you can afford to lose.
  - b. Count *losers* in the hand with the longest trump suit, *the master hand*.
    - ✓ Include losses needed to promote high cards.
  - c. **Analyze ways to eliminate extra losers.**
    - ✓ **Ruff losers from master hand using trump in supporting hand.**
    - ✓ Finesse opponent's high cards.
4. Execute the plan.
5. Watch defenders play.
6. Keep track of cards played.

There are situations in which you should not draw trump immediately. One common reason is because the trump in the supporting hand (usually the dummy) is needed to trump one or more losers from the master hand (usually your hand).

**RUFFING LOSERS**

When you are playing a suit contract and you are void in the suit that was led, you can *ruff* the trick by playing a trump card. One way to eliminate a loser is to ruff the loser.

Because you count the losers in the master hand, a ruff that uses a trump in the master hand does not eliminate any of the losers in that hand. This is illustrated in the example on the right. Assume that the trump suit is spades. The master hand, South, has one heart loser and three diamond losers. If your opponents try to take tricks in hearts, you can ruff the second heart in the master hand but that ruff does not eliminate a master hand loser. On the other hand, if you lose a diamond trick early, you can use the trump in the dummy to ruff two of the master hand diamond losers.

RUFFING										
♠	8 4 3 2									
♥	7 6 5 2									
♦	5									
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	N									
W		E								
	S									
♠	A K Q J T									
♥	3									
♦	T 9 4									

Now you know why *declarer points* do not include short suit distribution points but *dummy points* do include short suit distribution points if the dummy has trump!

Ruffing by using trump in the master hand should only be used when you must:

- stop opponents from running their long suit
- gain entry into the master hand by leading a loser in the dummy

To successfully ruff losers from the master hand by using trump in the supporting hand:

- ✓ the master hand must have more cards in the suit with losers than the supporting hand.
- ✓ the supporting hand must have enough trumps to ruff the losers.
- ✓ the master hand must have entries in other suits to get back to the master hand to lead the losers.

Suppose that hearts are trump. All of the following examples satisfy the first two conditions for a successful ruff:

RUFF 1 CLUB	RUFF 2 CLUBS	LOSE 1 • RUFF 2 CLUBS
♥ 9 7 3 ♣ A 4 _____ ♥ AKQJ 8 ♣ K 7 5	♥ 9 7 3 ♣ 4 _____ ♥ AKQJ 8 ♣ A 6 2	♥ 9 7 3 ♣ 4 _____ ♥ AKQJ 8 ♣ 8 7 5

In the example on the left you can cash the ♣A, lead low to the ♣K and then lead the losing club for a ruff in the dummy. There is always the possibility that one of your winners will be ruffed or that East will be able to overruff with the ♥T. But with the most likely club split being 5-3 (47%) or 4-4 (33%), the odds are in your favor. Since you only need one trump in the dummy, you could improve your odds by drawing two rounds of trump before playing the clubs.

In the middle example, you can cash the ♣A and lead one of the losing clubs for a ruff in the dummy. Now you can lead a heart to draw one round of trump and gain an entry back into your hand. Then you can repeat the ruff. Once again, the odds are in your favor because the missing clubs should be split 5-4 (59%) or 6-3 (31%).

The right hand example is more complicated because:

- You must lose a club trick to setup the ruff. If you have too many fast losers, you may not be able to afford the loss.
- A smart defender will cash the club and then lead a heart to reduce your ruffing power. But, that will leave you with two hearts in the dummy.
- Because you need to preserve the trump in the dummy, you need an entry in another suit to get back to your hand. If your only entry is in hearts, then you may not be able to repeat the ruff.

## COUNTING LOSERS • RUFFING LOSERS

## OPENING LEAD: ♦ Q

**Listen:** The bidding is no help.

**Observe:** The ♦ Q should be top of connecting honors.

**Pick:** South should be the master hand.

**Pause:** Can afford 3 South (master hand) losers.

**Look:** You have 4 South (master hand) losers

(1 slow ♠ + 1 slow ♥ + 0 ♦ + 2 slow ♣)

if hearts split 3-2 (68%) or 4-1 (28%).

**Analyze:** Can finesse against the ♥ K to eliminate one heart loser (50%). Can finesse against the ♣ K to eliminate one club loser (50%). Or, ruff two clubs in dummy to eliminate two club losers (89% if the missing clubs are split 5-4 (58%) or 6-3 (31%)). The ruff is the best alternative.

**Execute:** Cash the ♦ K and lead the ♣ 8 to the ♣ A. Then lead a club to ruff in the dummy. Lead a low spade to return to your hand to lead the last club to ruff in the dummy. Now lead the last heart from the dummy to try the heart finesse.

## NORTH - DUMMY

♠ K 6 4 2  
♥ 7 6 4  
♦ K 9 7 5 4  
♣ 8

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♥	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

## SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ A 9 3  
♥ A Q J T 5  
♦ A 6  
♣ A Q 7

## COUNTING LOSERS • RUFFING LOSERS • MANAGING ENTRIES

## OPENING LEAD: ♥ 9

**Listen:** The bidding is no help.

**Observe:** The ♥ 9 could be top of nothing, top of a doubleton, or singleton.

**Pick:** South should be the master hand.

**Pause:** Can afford 3 South (master hand) losers.

**Look:** You have 6 South (master hand) losers

(2 fast ♠ + 0 ♥ + 1 fast ♦ + 3 slow ♣).

**Analyze:** The best hope is to dummy ruff the three club losers. But need three entries into the master hand (♣ A, ♥ K, and ♥ J) and can not afford to draw trump because defenders will take the trump trick and lead trump to reduce ruffing power. Must hope hearts are split 4-3 (62%) and clubs are split 4-4 (33%). If clubs are split 5-3 (47%) the ♠ T or ♠ 8 will either take the third club ruff or force one of the missing spade honors.

**Now Execute:** Cash the ♥ A and lead the ♣ 9 from dummy. Cash the ♣ A and lead a low club to ruff in dummy. Lead the ♥ Q, overtake with the ♥ K, and lead a low club to repeat the ruff. Lead the ♥ 5, cash the ♥ J, and lead the last club for the final ruff.

## NORTH - DUMMY

♠ T 8 5 3  
♥ A Q 5  
♦ K T 7 4 3  
♣ 9

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

## SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ Q J 9 7 6  
♥ K J 4  
♦ 2  
♣ A J 5 2

## USING A CROSSRUFF

Since the offensive plan is based on counting and eliminating losers in the master hand, there is usually nothing to be gained by using a trump in the master hand to ruff a loser in the supporting hand. When you ruff in the hand with the long trump suit, you usually do not gain a trick and you increase the chance of losing control of the trump suit.

There are situations in which a ruff in the master hand is the best or only way to gain an entry into the hand. One of these is when you have a short suit in the dummy and a short suit in your hand. In that situation you should consider making trump tricks in each hand by ruffing back and forth. This technique is called a *crossruff*.

Consider the example on the right. Your hand has three losing hearts and four losing diamonds. There is a 50% chance that you can finesse against the ♥A to cover one loser. If you try the heart finesse and lose, a smart defender will lead trump to reduce your ruffing power.

If the missing diamonds are split 4-4 (33%) or 5-3 (47%) there is an 80% chance that you can cash the ♦A and then ruff four diamonds in the dummy. But, how do you get four entries back into your hand? You can not use spades to return to your hand because you need all four of dummy's trump for ruffs. But, you can cash the ♣A and ruff four clubs in your hand if the missing clubs are split 4-3 (62%).

As long as your early ruffs use the low trump, your later ruffs can not be overruffed. This gives you eight ruffs and two side Aces to make the contract.

If there is a bad diamond or club split, one of your early ruffs might be overruffed and you will need to revise this plan. If this happens, you may be forced to try the heart finesse.

In most cases you will lose control of the trump suit when you crossruff and you will not be able to draw defenders trump. This means that you must **take sure winners in the side suits early** because the longer you wait the more likely it is that the enemy will be able to trump your winners.

USING A CROSSRUFF

NORTH - DUMMY

♠ A Q 5 3

♥ K 8 6 4

♦

♣ A 9 6 3 2

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♣	Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ K J 6 2

♥ T 3 2

♦ A T 9 4 3

♣ 7

Opening Lead ♣Q